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1990
no. 9

ANTHROPOLOGY

The Incurable Disease

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AIS 499
Pembroke State University
1990

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INTRODUCTION

The new world, vast, untamed, and virtually unspoiled when found by the first white explorers, was abundant with plant and animal life; but also populated by humans. These humans numbered in the millions. Among these new found humans, there were many different cultures and languages, customs and religions. Some roamed the land hunting and fishing, while others lived settled lives farming as their ancestors had for thousands of years. These people were fascinating to the white explorers. The whites could not understand how so many traditions and languages could exist within one place. This complexity was new to the first white explorers of America.

DIFFERENT CULTURES, DIFFERENT TIMES

The first whites to come to America and those who followed were astonished and amazed by the people of the new world. These new world people would later be known collectively as Indians. These Indians gave the whites food and shelter when they were cold and hungry. In return the whites gave the Indians disease, death, and despair; and taught them to fear. The whites took the Indians' homeland, their dignity, and their pride. All the while the Indians still gave the whites love and compassion.

Years went by and the Indians were again "discovered" by another type of explorer. This explorer and settler would later be known as an Anthropologist. This Anthropologist to some Indians was no better than the first explorers, while to others they were god-sent. But what really is this Anthropologist and what does she/he do?

Anthropology is the study of man and man's culture. Anthropologists study other cultures besides Indians; for example, they study Asian, Mexican, African, and South American cultures. In this paper, I will concentrate on how the Anthropologist has dealt with the Indian, and how the Indian has reacted. I will discuss the methods used by Anthropologists, and who the Anthropologists are.

Who Are They?

The first American Anthropologist, sometimes called the father of modern Anthropology, was Franz Boas. Boas led the way for many Anthropologists that followed. Many American Anthropologists today studied directly under Boas or studied under a protege or student of his.

Anthropology in the 19th and 20th centuries has taken many different roads. Anthropology is divided into sub-disciplines including Cultural Anthropology, Biological Anthropology, Archaeology, and Linguistics. Cultural Anthropology is the discipline I will concentrate on in this

paper. Cultural Anthropologists use several techniques to study Indians. Some Anthropologists study Indian groups directly by doing field work, while others do research from data compiled by other Anthropologists.

Many Anthropologists in the early days studied the Indian with a synchronic view, such as E. Adamson Hoebel in the late 1950's, who studied the Cheyennes. The synchronic view means Hoebel wrote of the Cheyennes as though they lived at only one time in history. Such Anthropologists wrote about things they thought were important rather than telling the entire story. Later on there were some Anthropologists who took a different view of the Indian. These Anthropologists used the diachronic view, which tells more of the story from beginning to end, using an historical perspective. Loretta Fowler, for example, used this diachronic view when writing about the Gros Ventre. The diachronic view was not used as often as it might have been, which has caused problems between some Indians and Anthropologists.

Many people today, both Indian and non-Indian, are very upset by the way Anthros have grouped Indian people into neat little packages as being "all alike". For example, one man states that "Those people have been classified/combined with one another or sub-divided, lumped together or split apart by Anthropologists in a variety of ways" (Newcomb, '73; p. 33). Others for example, feel that Anthropologists

generalize too often when writing about Indians collectively. They seem to show that all Indians are the same, in looks, speech, religion, dress; and they still remain relics of the past. This type of writing stereotypes Indians. Many Anthros seem to believe their own stereotypes which they create about Indians. If an Indian tribe does not fall into their category, Anthros seem to have no interest in studying that tribe.

Many tribes were never studied because Anthros felt these tribes did not fit their definition of "Indians". Thus the Indians of the Southeast were not studied as much as other tribes because they were a very progressive people. They did not live in the ways the Indians of the plains lived; riding horses, hunting buffalo, and living in teepees. Some of the Southeastern tribes lived in large cities with thousands of people. In some of these cities, there were very complex religious centers, with huge earthen mounds which had temples on top. The Indians who lived in these cities relied primarily on corn and other vegetable crops to survive and this meant they had large vegetable gardens. Historically, farming is not seen as something Indians do; they are often thought of as hunters and gatherers only. Farming is seen as part of European culture. Indians have been farmers for about 4,000 years. The Indians of the Southeast were at the height of their culture when discovered by early whites.

After white "discovery" of these advanced people, diseases from Europe almost destroyed the entire population of Indians of the Southeast. The whites finally did destroy the culture of these Indians and they began to live the ways of the white man hundreds of years before the western tribes were "discovered". Maybe this means the Anthros are interested in the old ways of the Indians more than in the Indians themselves. This seems to be true in many cases but not in all. Some people, for example, believe that Anthropologists have preserved the history of Indian people by writing and recording the history of certain Indian tribes, saving it for future generations. This probably is true, because historically Indians did not have a written language and it was impossible for the tribe to write down their own history.

Is it good for Anthros to record such histories? Does this destroy the oral history of the Indian people, or does it help them to remember their history better? Are those histories written by Anthros accurate? Does important information get lost in translation, due to the fact that Indian culture and white culture are so different?

Anthropologists often interpret Indian history the way they think it should be. Many tend to find similarities among Indian tribes, and then lump them all together. This lumping-together of tribes has created

modern Indians who feel they have been treated unjustly because of the Anthropologists.

The Indian Perspective

There was a study completed in a workshop on how Indians and non-Indians feel about Anthropology today (Anthropology and the American Indian; 1973); how Anthropology has affected Indians in the past and how it affects them today. The panel consisted of Indian people from all over the United States, as well as non-Indian people. Other members of the panel were Anthropologists, both Indian and non-Indian. This distinguished panel included such Indian people as Bea Medicine, Vine Deloria Jr., and Alfonzo Ortiz.

Mr. Ortiz defended Anthropology by stating what a great science it is. In defending Anthropology he said "If all Anthropologists were lined up one day, shot and killed, that it would not make any difference in the world" (Ortiz; 1973, p. 91). In my opinion, Ortiz said this to show that Anthropologists are like anyone else, if they did not exist things would remain pretty much the same. Ortiz does not view Anthropology as a problem. This may be due to the fact that he is an Anthropologist. Ortiz clearly thinks Anthropology is necessary to help keep Indian traditions from disappearing, and to keep Indian history alive.

Although Anthros are credited by Ortiz with preserving Indian history, they have been too persistent in their

studies of Indian people. This persistence gets the Anthro the information she/he needs; but it often makes Indian people uneasy. Why can't Anthros treat Indians as though they are "real" people, instead of placing them under a microscope like some kind of microscopic animal to be probed and prodded until sore and degraded?

Vine Deloria Jr., noted author, attorney, and Indian activist, takes the opposite side of the issue in response to Ortiz. In response to the statement by Ortiz, Deloria said he would love to try and see if the world would change if all Anthropologists were shot and killed. Deloria feels that Anthropologists have caused more damage to Indians than they have good, and Anthropology makes Indians feel that they have to dress, speak, and act like their ancestors did in order to be recognized as Indians.

Problems, Because of Anthros.

Anthropologists have caused many problems among Indian tribes they have studied. A perfect example of one of these tribes is the Lumbee Indians of North Carolina. Lumbees were "studied" in the 1930's by physical anthropologist Carl Selezer. (cited in Dial and Eliades, 1975; p. 19). This study was completed to determine the number of pure bloods, and half bloods or less, remaining in the tribe. Selezer was sent to Robeson County to conduct this study because the Lumbees had petitioned the federal government

to become formally recognized as Indians. The Lumbees also wanted to get benefits from the Indian Reorganization Act (Dial, Eliades, 1975; p. 20).

Selezer used anthropometry in his attempt to determine who was Indian. Anthropometry is the science of human measurements. Selezer measured the crania of 209 Indian people in Robeson County; out of this number only 22 people were found to be "half blood" or more. The outcome of this study is clearly wrong in my opinion. Selezer's findings could not have been correct due to the fact that the study found half bloods and non-Indians in the same family, even as closely related as brother and sister. How could this be? This evidence would seem to show that his findings were not correct. But because of this study, many problems have been caused within the Lumbee Tribe. It has torn family and friends apart as well as the tribe. Selezer's study has also helped to keep the Lumbee people from receiving much needed financial assistance from the federal government. This is only one instance where Anthropology has caused problems for Indian people.

Many years later the Lumbees were again studied by two more Anthropologists. The first Anthropologist was Karen Blu, whose book was called The Lumbee Problem, The Making of an American Indian People. The second Anthropologist was Stan Knick, who was conducting his doctoral research

The title of his paper was Growing Up Down Home. Both works were researched very well using field work and ethnographic materials to find information, although neither work had very much impact for the good or bad.

However, Blu's book did offend some Lumbee people, with such statements concerning Lumbee identity: "Indians articulate coherently only one aspect of their group identity, which means that part of it is not obvious (in any organized way) to Lumbees themselves": (Blu, 1980, p. 134). One Lumbee responded to Blu's statement by saying "What nerve!" (Linda Oxendine, 1990; personal communication). Other statements made by Blu were not accepted by Oxendine either, but she does agree with some things Blu says in her book. (Oxendine, 1990, personal communication).

Although Knick's paper was not widely published, I feel that the information he discussed would not have been of a controversial nature to the Lumbee people. The questions asked in Knick's survey were viewed by some people as "too personal", "being nosey", and some people said it was "none of his business". (Locklear, 1988, personal communication). Fortunately in the end, Knick's work was a success for him and the Lumbee.

I believe Knick's research was a success because of the approach he took. He had the attitude that he would

take the Lumbee "on their own terms and respect them as a culture" (Knick, 1986; p. 16). This attitude seems to be rare among many of the anthropological works that I have studied. Rather than Knick intruding too much or asking too many questions of the Lumbee, he showed them respect and in return the Lumbee showed him respect by answering the question and returning his survey forms. Although some people thought his questions were of a personal nature, the Lumbee probably felt Knick's work was being done for the good of their people.

This type of anthropological work is rare when it does not receive much feedback from Indians whom it affects. Other Indian groups have been studied more in depth than the Lumbees, because the Lumbees do not fit many of the descriptions associated with other Indian groups. They were not horseback riding buffalo hunters with bows and arrows when first encountered by early white settlers. This does not mean that Lumbees did not hunt with bows and arrows or ride horses, but the Plains Tribes of the West were associated more with this type of culture.

PEOPLE OF THE PLAINS

The Cheyennes lived and hunted on the Great Plains, traveling by horse (once horses became available, following Spanish explorations on horseback) and hunting buffalo. The buffalo was the main source of food, clothing and shelter for the Cheyennes.

The Cheyennes have been the subject for many Anthropologists in the past because of the exotic way in which they lived. One Anthropologist that studied the Cheyennes in the 1950's was E. Adamson Hoebel. Hoebel's style of writing and reporting is an example of the synchronic style mentioned earlier in this paper. Hoebel describes the ceremonies, social structure, war activities and world view of the Cheyennes.

The methods Hoebel used to do his research included field work as well as the ethno-historical method. This means he lived with the Cheyennes for a period of time and did interviews and surveys, and also reviewed the works of other Anthropologists including Dorsey and Grinnell. Hoebel made it clear in his writings what he was doing and why. He did not feel he needed to repeat things in his study that other Anthropologists had already written. For example, he was reporting on the Sun Dance of the Cheyennes and noted that Dorsey and Grinnell had previously recorded the Sun Dance in more detail. For Hoebel's purposes he only used the major points that he felt were most important. Hoebel described other ceremonies that had not previously been recorded, such as the Sacred Arrow Ceremony. In his description of this ceremony, Hoebel took a detailed look at what went on in the ceremony and why it was held.

Hoebel attempted to explain why the Cheyenne held such ceremonies. In his explanations, Hoebel made some assumptions that I totally disagreed with and felt he should not have made. I know he was just explaining what he saw, but I get the impression that Hoebel was judging the Cheyennes. His explanations were not of a derogatory nature, but I felt Hoebel was trying to read more into the Cheyennes' ceremonies than was there. By him being from a different culture, things held different meanings for him and different meanings in Cheyennes culture.

Hoebel was also interested in the Cheyennes' world view; what certain ceremonies meant to the Cheyennes and what gratification the Cheyennes received from their ceremonies. Hoebel was more interested in the Cheyennes' notion of what their world was all about, rather than how the Cheyennes fit into the "whole" picture. Hoebel did not include the views of people outside the Cheyennes community. I think this is essential to determine how the Cheyennes world view coincides with that of the outside world. As one Anthropologist stated concerning this type of writing, "A Native American world view can be maintained, threatened, or destroyed; can adapt and change; but almost never is to be seen as it co-exists with others in a dynamic way." (Blu, 1980; p. xii).

Hoebel was more concerned with the way the Cheyennes were living before and during his field work than he was

in finding out why the Cheyennes lived the way they did. This is a style of writing that often causes problems between Anthropologists and Indians. The Anthropologist is so interested in knowing what happened in the past that they tend to forget that Indians exist today, not as they did one hundred years ago. There was a song written about Anthropologists who have worn Indians out by trying to find out who the Indian was and not who he is today. Part of the song goes as follows:

And the Anthros still keep coming
like death and taxes to our land;
to study their feathered freaks
with funded money in their hand.
Like a Sunday at the Zoo.
their high-priced cameras click away-
taking notes and tape recording
all the animals at play.
Here comes the Anthros
better hide the past away
Here come the Anthros
on another holiday . . . (Westerman, 1969, "Custer
Died for Your Sins".)

This is one example of how some Indians feel about Anthropologists and their studies.

Not all Anthropologists write about Indians the way Hoebel does. There are those who use a more descriptive

and diacronic approach to their work. This is not to say Hoebel's book was not descriptive, but it was done with a synchronic approach which I do not like as well as other works.

A NEW OUTLOOK

As stated by an Anthropologist, "In order to understand how the Western Apache live today, it is essential to have some idea of how they lived prior to the establishment of reservations. (Basso, 1970; p. 1)." Loretta Fowler must have believed the same thing when writing Shared Symbols, Contested Meanings, because she writes with a diachronic view of the Gros Ventre, depicting them through time from 1778 to 1984.

When reading Fowler's book, a person gets the impression that the Gros Ventre are a progressive people who change with the times and who are not lost in the past. The Gros Ventre still practice some of their ancient customs and ceremonies, but they live in the present. Fowler shows that the Gros Ventre have taken control of their lives as well as their tribal affairs, and they have been very successful. Several positions in the tribe once held by whites are now held by Gros Ventre people; for example, positions such as reservation superintendent, realty officer, and tribal attorney. Most programs that were earlier administered by whites, are now administered by the Gros Ventre and Assiniboines (Fowler, 1984; p. 1).

From the beginning of the reservation in the late 19th century, the Gros Ventre were considered to be very "civilized" and "progressive". What did progressive and civilized mean? Did it hold the same meaning to the whites as it did to the Gros Ventre? "Civilized" and "progressive" were also used by the Gros Ventres and Assiniboines to describe themselves when talking to others. Fowler also asked: did progressiveness help the tribe fare better than other tribes in terms of economics and political independence?

What Did She Do?

Fowler's study took many years of research from several sources as well as seven years of field work among the Gros Ventre people at Fort Belknap. Fowler gives a detailed description of the life of the Gros Ventre at the time she did her field work. Fowler used a technique she calls the "ethno-historical method" which means "examining and evaluating written accounts provided by Anthropology" (Fowler, 1987; p. 11). This was done so she could compare the Gros Ventre as they were when she did her field work with those of the past.

Fowler could have taken several different approaches to this book. She could have described the Gros Ventre as they were during contact or the early days of reservation life. She could have chosen one age group or several groups; instead she chose to do them all. Fowler also described the world view of the Gros Ventre and how they fit into

the world around them. She also showed how outsiders view of the world shaped and coincided with the world view of the Gros Ventre. Why did she choose this style? Was it an easier approach to take, or was it more interesting? The approach Fowler used was clearly more informative and revealing than the approach many Anthropologists use.

Fowler chose to do research on the Gros Ventre because no one else had written an account of them before, except for two unpublished papers completed by the tribe itself. She found in her studies that the Gros Ventres' culture had changed drastically in the last 50 years. She also found in her research many explanations and descriptions of the same ceremony or event. This is where she got the name for her book: Shared Symbols, Contested Meanings. The Gros Ventre disagreed about the meanings for many of their ceremonies and events that took place on their reservation. These symbols may have carried different meanings in the lives of the Gros Ventre, but they all used and shared them.

The Gros Ventre performed only a few of their traditional ceremonies, because they had lost many of their traditions. The younger and more educated people of the tribe were trying to bring back the old traditions at the time of Fowler's field work. The young people called it a "Cultural Revival". Fowler referred to it as a "period of resurgence" (Fowler, 1987; p. 1). The young people participated in

the modern day Pan-Indian Pow-Wow, but this didn't seem to be enough; they felt they needed their old traditions to be "Indian".

The Gros Ventre Elders did not seem to be willing to teach the young people the old dances, songs, and ceremonies. The Elders felt the young people wanted to learn these things so they could do shows for the white tourists. This is an example of shared symbols and contested meanings. The Elders did not believe the young people were interested in their traditions for what they were, but to make money from them.

I applaud Fowler on her brilliant display of modern Anthropological techniques, and her diachronic way of describing Gros Ventre life at Fort Belknap. Anthropologists like her show the outside world that Indians are real people and not the Indians of western movies and Wild West Shows. Fowler's writings about Gros Ventre were well documented and her field work gave her the real insight she needed to portray the Gros Ventre as they really were. One day when the young people of this tribe are older, they can read this book and not make the same mistakes as their Elders did. Now the Gros Ventre will live forever, if not in flesh, then in the pages of Fowler's book.

THE EFFECTS OF ANTHROPOLOGY

These books, The Cheyennes and Shared Symbols, Contested Meanings, are two examples of anthropological work that were written in two different time periods. These examples show the diversity between Anthropologists and help people to see there are good aspects to Anthropology.

On the other hand, there are these Anthropologists who have been too persistent in their studies of Indians. This is why so many Indians do not like Anthropologists. Many tribes today will not talk with people if they are Anthropologists. The word Anthropology is an instant turn-off to many tribes. Anthropology had potential to help Indian people in a good way. Yet, they did not always do it. Maybe the Anthropologists intended to do good but their work, in many cases, has not shown this.

The Navajo Nation has been studied by Anthropologists more than any other tribe in the United States. There is a joke I heard concerning the Navajo family. A question was asked, what is the definition of a Navajo family? The answer, a father, mother, two kids, and an Anthropologist. (Stan Knick, personal communication, 1990)

In the past, many Indians have been very nasty towards Anthropologists. They have refused Anthropologists food and water to get rid of them. Others have resorted to violence to rid themselves of Anthropologists. Indians have personal lives just like everyone else and they need

some time to themselves. Anthropologists should see this as a problem and respect the Indians more.

Anthropology hurts Indians in other ways than being so persistent. Anthropology in many cases causes stereotypes about Indians to form; stereotypes that are damaging, not only to Indian people, but to Non-Indians as well. Indian people want to fit into society as people, but they also want to hold onto their heritage. When non-Indians see Indian people in a business suit and tie, they don't recognize them as Indian. Non-Indians have been programmed this way from young children. If they see that same person in jeans, moccasins, turquoise and silver jewelry, they automatically know that person is Indian. This stereotype causes many young Indians not to want an education or to join mainstream society. They like who they are and want to be recognized for who they are.

Non-Indian people are hurt as well by these same stereotypes, though not in the same ways as Indian people. This hurts them by leaving them ignorant to facts about Indian people. Anthropologists need to look at themselves and analyze the work they have completed. In such reflexive analysis there may be a solution to the problems that have been created due to their work.

Working for the Good

Good things can come from Indians and Anthropologists working together. This is especially true in North Carolina

where Indians and Anthropologists have worked together to stop pot hunters and looters of Indian burial sites. They worked together with the North Carolina State Legislators to come up with a law that prohibits such acts. (Ben Jacobs, 1990 personal communication)

Another example where Indians worked along with Anthropologist to save a historic Indian Village in North Carolina was with Town Creek Indian Mound. Town Creek is a restored Indian Ceremonial Site that is now a tourist attraction and an archeological dig site. This place operates on contributions to keep their doors open for the public. Contributions had decreased and people had almost stopped visiting the site. The Anthropologists that were in charge of this place contacted the North Carolina Commission of Indian Affairs and asked them to help keep Town Creek open.

In 1984, the state of North Carolina proclaimed the third week of September as "Indian Heritage Week." This week opens with ceremonies, a pow-wow, and guest speakers. The North Carolina Commission of Indian Affairs decided to hold these ceremonies at Town Creek. As a result, Town Creek is now thriving again with lots of support, both monetary and attendance. (Ben Jacobs, 1990 personal communication). These examples show that when Indians and Anthropologists work together, good things can come about from their cooperation.

Things to Come

Just as the title of Loretta Fowler's book says, Shared Symbols, Contested Meanings, this is the impression I get of Anthropology. There are many things Anthropologists see that are the same, but each person has his own definition of that symbol. Maybe this is why Anthropology is such a great science. An Anthropologist is free to do research and field work, then record his/her own findings anyway he/she sees fit. No matter how many Anthropologists study the same tribe, each person sees the Indian in a different way. There is no other science like Anthropology. There are no exacts, no certain way its done; it all depends upon the researcher.

As long as there are Indian people, there will be Anthropologists to study them. No matter how much they are hated or loved, the Anthropologist will ask their questions, regardless of how private the question might be. No matter how many Anthropologists there are, Indian people will have to learn to get along with them, and answer their questions.

Anthropology seems to be an incurable disease, spreading and growing in Indian communities all over America. Since there is apparently no cure for this disease, maybe it can be put to good use. Anthropology by recording the history and culture of Indians, can help prevent mistakes previously made from being made again.

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